DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 241 006 IR 020 076

AUTHOR	Gaffney, Maureen, Ed.
TITLE	Films and Feelings.
PUB DATE	81
NOTE	21p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Media Center for Children, Inc., 3 West 29th Street, New York, NY 10001 (write for price; quantity discounts available).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
JOURNAL CIT	Young Viewers Magazine; v4 n2 Spr 1981
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Classroom Communication; Classroom Environment; Elementary Education; *Emotional Experience; *Emotional Response; Film Criticism; Filmographies; *Films; Media Selection; Program Descriptions; Program Development
IDENTIFIERS	Film Reviews; Media Appraisal; Media Education; PF Project

ABSTRACT

Children's emotional responses to films are the focus of the four articles in this issue designed for media specialists and educators. Following an editorial discussing the responsibilities of media as put forth by Bruno Bettleheim, the first article presents a methodology and rationale for using story films to encourage children's exploration of their feelings. An annotated film bibliography is included. The second article presents a Media Center for Children film and activity session illustrating the following techniques for using films with children: a scaffolding introduction, talking aloud during the screening, and post-film discussions. The use of media as a means of bringing feelings into the classroom is the topic of the third article. Several books which can form a foundation for this new approach to media in education are described. This issue concludes with a review supplement of seven films ranging from pure cinema to nature study documentary. (LP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

young viewers

Spring 1981

ED241006

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Maureen Gaffney

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

IR 080 076

films and feelings

young viewers

Spring 1981 (Vol 4, No 2)

© Copyright 1981, the Media Center for Children, Inc. Published by the Media Center for Children (MCC), a non-profit educational organization, Young Viewers is supported by subscriptions and by grants from the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, the Billy Rose Foundation, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Subscriptions are available for fifteen dollars per volume (four issues a year) from MCC at 3 West 29th Street, New York NY 10001. Subscriptions outside the USA are twenty dollars ($US); overseas airmail is an additional ten dollars ($US). Subscriptions run from January to December and new subscribers will receive the complete volume of the year their subscription begins.

Maureen Gaffney, Editor; Gina Michaels, Managing Editor; Merrill Lee Fuchs, Molly Hankwitz, Regina Dahlgren, Assistant Editors.

contents

3 OPERATING ON METAPHOR: Using Film/Activities to Explore Feelings
by Joanna Uhry. Ms. Uhry teaches reading and social studies at the Calhoun School in Manhattan. She has an MA in Art and Art Education from Teachers' College and has since specialized in learning disabilities. She is also a sculptor and has been a film evaluation consultant for the Media Center for Children since 1975.

9 SINKENKONG AND KALAMAZOO: A Media Center Film/Activity Evaluation
by Merrill Lee Fuchs. Research Director of the Media Center for Children, Ms. Fuchs directed MCC's pilot museum film evaluation project and has conducted several hundred film evaluations with children. She has an MA in Early Childhood Education from the Bank Street College of Education.

13 A DOLL, A TRUCK, A LOVING ADULT: Going Beyond Critical Viewing
by Barbara Weber. Ms. Weber is a free-lance writer with a background in children's theater.

16 FILM REVIEW SUPPLEMENT
The seven films reviewed by MCC staff and film evaluation interns range from pure cinema to nature study documentaries. The film titles are: FIELD REPORT 27/3ES/025, JERRY'S RESTAURANT, KALEIDOFORM, SOMETHING QUEER AT THE LIBRARY, STEAMBOAT, WILLIAM, and THE WOLF AND THE WHITE TAIL.

Artwork on the cover is from the film THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE.

editorial

This past February world-renowned psychologist and author, Bruno Bettelheim, spoke on the subject of media at the American Film Institute in Washington DC. During his talk, titled "Moving Images: The State of the Art", Bettelheim stated that movies ought to concern themselves with "the problems of what it means to be human...[and they] must affirm, even celebrate, being human."

He made some interesting observations about movies' role for young people. Bettelheim talked about why he, hardly a film buff, went to the movies when he was a teenager. He went for the very same reasons adolescents go today -- because, more than any other art form, movies allow them an opportunity to observe and learn about other people's desires, motivations, and personal conflicts. Movies provide images which, along with the real people in their lives, are formative of youngsters' personalities. Unfortunately, as he pointed out, most movies fail to encourage the kind of understanding that viewers, especially young viewers, need in order to make sense out of life.

Bettelheim went on to say that the art of the moving image, by which he means both film and television, bears a unique responsibility. Today, when neither religion nor politics have the influence they had in the past, only a popular and important form of communication can provide people with the answers to contemporary concerns. Bettelheim concludes that, because moving images are "the central art of our time, and the most authentic of all American arts", it is the job of this art form to give people a new avenue for exploring the important questions of the age -- and to give people some new answers. Bettelheim says this must involve the creation of new myths. Three of the works he specifically mentioned as good examples of what film can do in this regard were KAGEMUSHA, which shows the extraordinary possibilities inherent in the most ordinary of men, and 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY and STAR WARS -- both of which, like much good science fiction, help relieve anxiety and reassure people -- young people -- that there will always be a place for human values.

He also commented that the existing literature on film and television deals primarily with technical matters. In our view this is a particularly dangerous situation. And, although Dr. Bettelheim mentioned children's special needs, we have no information about his views on those needs vis-a-vis moving images. Perhaps he is planning to publish an article or a book on the subject; if he does, we will wait eagerly to learn how this lucid humanist defines those needs. If he does not, we would urge him to do so.

In the meantime, this issue of Young Viewers presents several articles which discuss using film with children, with particular emphasis on children's feeling responses to film. (Bettelheim's book, The Uses of Enchantment, inspired the project which is documented in the lead article.) Children's feelings are too little considered in the current literature -- especially in the "critical viewing" materials. As Bettelheim mentioned in his talk, too much of the literature in the field concentrates on media technology -- ignoring both the state of the art and its human responsibility.

Collage by Wendy Roth

operating on metaphor

using film/activities to explore feelings

by joanna uhry

Using narrative films with children, and learning how to select and use them so as to encourage children's exploration of feelings, has been one of the great pleasures of my life as an elementary school teacher. Children enjoy many different types of film, but although I have used non-narrative films quite successfully as part of an arts curriculum, they seem to respond especially well to story films which involve conflict or danger. In this article, I would like to discuss my rationale and methodology for using story films.

Lost in the Forest

All the elementary teachers at the Calhoun School, the independent school on Manhattan's upper West Side where I work, use story films as part of the social studies curriculum because they serve as vehicles for talking about people and their relationships. Sometimes the films are directly related to study of another culture, so that cognitive learning is involved, but films are frequently used because they are an effective means to start discussions and help children develop insights about their own lives. Typically, the energy level during the screening of good films is very high, but the follow-up discussions too often seem stilted. When children are asked questions such as, "What would you have done or felt in this or that situation?" their responses do not seem particularly truthful. No doubt children idealize their behavior--and why not? On some levels it may be healthy for them to insist that they will always be brave, loving, sharing, and understanding; however, I wondered if there wasn't some way to channel the energy films generated (when they worked well) to help children connect with and express their actual feelings.

I thought about the problem for a long time, then while reading Bruno Bettelheim's book, The Uses of Enchantment [1], I saw the possibilty of an answer. Bettelheim states that children's egos are too fragile to actually confront many of their problems and terrors in a direct way; but, he says, fairy tales can help children cope with fears and hopes. These fairy tales, told over and over, provide children with metaphors for dealing with problems such as separation anxiety, conflict with parents, growing up, and independence. I saw connections between what Bettelheim said about fairy tales and what I wanted to do with films. His work suggested an approach to using film in an exciting way: as a springboard to help children deal with reality metaphorically.

If I wanted the films to operate metaphorically, why not plan follow-up activities which would also operate metaphorically? [2] Bettelheim's position that children understand the metaphors in fairy tales is apparently supported by psychologist Erik H. Erikson, who maintains that elementary school children are capable of metaphorical thought. [3] From my own experiences, I know that a head-on, direct discussion of a film could make children uncomfortably--and unproductively--self-conscious. Moreover, since I have observed children invent and understand metaphors, [4] why not ask them to operate on metaphor?

A Small Clearing

It is common knowledge that children's games and artwork are vehicles by which they often explore questions, new situations or information, and problems. Since I wanted to use film and fantasy-invoking situations to help children respond to their own feelings about difficult issues, I developed a year-long program of films and follow-up activities. The programs were to be used by all eight groups of first through fourth grades at Calhoun and children would be encouraged to replay the themes of various films using art, dramatic play, and creative writing rather than traditional discussions. [5]

We tried a folktale film first. Tom Davenport's HANSEL AND GRETEL, AN APPALACHIAN VERSION evokes feelings relating to issues such as anxiety about being separated from or deserted by parents and the frightening aspects of angry adults. The film's setting is realistic--an Appalachian cabin in the woods--but it contains fantasy elements as well; for instance, the witch and the gingerbread house are both portrayed nonrealistically.

Like all good fairy tales, HANSEL AND GRETEL, AN APPALACHIAN VERSION clearly states "once upon a time..." right at the beginning, thus placing it outside the realm of everyday reality for children and providing the distance children need to feel comfortable with powerful feelings and ideas.

Dramatic play seemed a good follow-up because the film is about relationships and personalities. So, after seeing the film, children selected parts and acted out their favorite scenes. The energy level was high and, while no one ever said, "My mother was mean like that this morning...," children who chose to play the stepmother/witch depicted the meanest of all possible mean stepmothers. After a forty-five minute period of improvising, third/fourth graders wanted to create and present a performance of their play.

During rehearsals, which went on over a period of several weeks, I was fascinated by how children changed and expanded on the film.[6] Although HANSEL AND GRETEL, AN APPALACHIAN VERSION contained no references to the stepmother's cooking, the children's performance included a long sequence, enacted with great enthusiasm, in which the stepmother prepared a meal of "...rotten bread, sour milk, and slimy stew." I asked the stepmother/actress if the food would poison Hansel and Gretel. "It would only make them sick and unhappy," was the response; "It couldn't kill them because they don't die in the movie."[7] That actress was, quite literally, playing with the idea of an angry mother; she seemed to be testing reality, asking how far a mean mother would dare to go. (Apparently, a murdering mother would have been too scary even to wonder about.) The film provided a safe framework in which the woodcutter's children could be fed "disgusting food" and later abandoned, but not killed.

Rites of Passage

Another liveaction film, SOLO, dealt with conquering fears. A male climber struggles to the top of a dangerous, snow-covered mountain--alone, except for a tiny frog he picks up along the way and carries in his pocket. Themes of independence, courage, danger, and rites of passage emerge from the film. As a follow-up activity, I developed an assignment in which (although I never actually verbalized this) children were encouraged to project their fears onto the film character, whom we named Solo Man. Children were asked to write Chapter Two (the film being Chapter One) in the saga of his adventures. What dangers might await Solo Man if he came to New York City?

A timid girl, who never expressed any enthusiasm for gym and who rarely took any physical risks or entered competitive games, wrote a beautiful story in which Solo Man wanted to become a New York Yankee. Initially, he was afraid to try out, but he got up enough courage "...on the second day" and eventually became the star of a winning game. The author would never have admitted to such a fantasy in the first person, but through the Solo Man character she was able to articulate her longing to overcome her fear of competition and physical activity.

Another child wrote that Solo Man took a subway trip involving many scary loud noises. Fear of the subway is something that New York City children must come to grips with.

Taking on the Heavyweights

Even very difficult subjects, such as death and disappearance, were comfortably handled when films involved good stories which could be replayed or played later using an art form. Fingerpaint allowed children to recapture their experience of THE SAND CASTLE, a fanciful puppet animation by Co Hoedeman. In the film, ephemeral sand creatures cooperate in building a sand castle which is wrecked eventually by a wind storm. The ending is ambiguous; first graders weren't sure whether the creatures were dead or simply hiding underground, waiting for a chance to rebuild their castle. Perhaps because of this ambiguity, they enjoyed watching the end of the film over and over, both backward and forward.

As a follow-up to THE SAND CASTLE, I decided to use a highly changeable material. Since fingerpaint suggests easy transformations, I gave children lots of paint and told them to work directly on a waterproof tabletop. Castles and creatures were drawn, then wiped away. First graders were attracted to the repetitive qualities of the activity. They talked as they worked; one child said, "He's going away; he's gone. I'll make him again--come back!" This child was playing with concepts of disappearance and loss, as well as separation and reappearance, much as a toddler plays peek-a-boo to reassure her/himself that parents who go away will also return.

SUN FLIGHT, Gerald McDermott's nonverbal version of the Dedalus and Icarus myth, deals quite directly with the theme of death. Visualized in powerfully simple silk-screened paint animation (on acetate cels), the film shows father and son condemned by Minos, then searching for a way out of the labyrinth, constructing their wings, and finally Icarus' plunging into the sea as Dedalus watches, sobbing. After seeing the film, each child was asked to close her/his eyes and recall one image from SUN FLIGHT--a device called an image skim which was developed by Richard Lacey.[8] After this exercise, I gave children boxes of paper, sorted by color, to tear into pieces for making collages. The paper was predominantly tissue, a paper which has a translucent quality similar to the images in the film.

I asked children to make their remembered images using tissue paper. I specifically asked them not to use pencils because I wanted them to work quickly and broadly rather than becoming involved in minute detail. Their images--both in the verbal image skim and in their collages--recalled four moments in the film: the huge figure of Minos towering over Dedalus and Icarus at the top of the stairs which led into the labyrinth; the search through the labyrinth itself for a way out; the flight toward the sun; and the moment of Icarus' death. Most of the children used one of the first three images--the labyrinth itself being used most often.[9]

After completing their collages, children were asked to write a narrative soundtrack for the nonverbal film. Not surprisingly, the visual images from both SUN FLIGHT and the children's own collages had a strong effect on their verbal imagery. One nine-year-old drew from the film's ending (where sorrowing Dedalus is crouched within a circular motif); she used this design in her collage and wrote in her narration that Dedalus was "...forever encircled with grief." The sequence of activities leading up to this verbal expression had helped her, not only in exploring her feelings about the film, but also in articualting them. Using art materials nonverbally had also encouraged a real "playing with" ideas and words, words that were more satisfying than "he felt sad" which is a typical reply when children are questioned directly about feelings--either theirs or the character's. Gertrude Stein called poetry "...essentially the discovery, the love, the passion for the name of anything."[10] Clearly, this girl was making poetry by discovering a way to talk about what mattered to her in SUN FLIGHT.

Another child, whose grandfather had died, never talked about his feelings of loss (or any other feelings related to his grandfather's death) either at school or, as I learned from his mother, at home. His narration of SUN FLIGHT was a simple, accurate retelling of the story, but he spent a great deal of time working on his collage which was carefully pieced together from torn paper. Of the twenty-seven who did this project, I felt it was significant that he was one of only two children who chose to show the actual moment of death in his collage. While he was still not ready to talk about his feelings in school, he took advantage of a non-threatening way to raise issues and explore feelings about death and dying.

Making Connections

Naturally, not every film/activity combination worked. In developing activities I discovered--sometimes through my failures--that, while painting, drawing, acting, and writing are all valid ways of reacting to film materials, the medium of expression must fit the particular work. Films about transformation require easily transformable materials such as clay, fingerpaint, sand, or watercolors. Films about personalities and emotional relationships work well when they can be replayed through dramatic activities. The follow-ups had to fit the form (which includes kinesthetic and visual/aural qualities) as well as the theme of the films.

One third/fourth grade class, which did a painting activity after seeing HANSEL AND GRETEL, AN APPALACHIAN VERSION got very caught up in the fluid qualities of the paint itself, and the children talked about color mixing rather than the film's themes as they painted. Thus, despite the fact that investigating the sensory qualities of paint is a valid experience, it neither enhanced or explained the experience of the film, nor helped children respond to the issues raised by the film.

I also found that it could be a mistake to ask children to draw as a way of extending the experience of a highly realistic film. THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE: THE LONG, LONG JOURNEY is a dramatized, true-life story done quite movingly, for the most part with actors but with the story's real subject, the immigrant boy as an old man, in the end. Fourth graders, who at the age of nine are concerned with making their drawings look realistic, found it frustrating to recreate scenes they particularly remembered from the film. They became more involved in making their drawings look "real" than in following their playful, investigative impulses--responses which might have led them to an in-depth experience with one or more of the film's themes.

At times the visual qualities of a film suggest follow-up materials. WINDY DAY, for example, is a watercolor animation about two young sisters who alternate playing dress-up and pretending with exploring the world through their senses and conversations. One girl turns into a bride and they play "wedding." Babies are born. A fish dies. Every aspect of the human life-cycle is questioned as they go through their reality/fantasy transformations.

I chose watercolors as the follow-up medium, in part so that the children's artwork would have similarities to that in the film, but also (and perhaps for the same reason that filmmakers Faith and John Hubley chose watercolors in the first place) because it is a medium which changes easily. Watercolor is better for expressing the process of change than for working in detail, so children were asked to start with a particular image--one they recalled from the film--and let the paints bleed, one color into another, until the image changed. The film's themes--birth, sex, and death--came out in conversation after conversation, casually at times, as the children worked. One group began talking about dreams as they painted. Spontaneously, they began painting their own dreams and I had a rare opportunity to hear fantasies and questions not often shared in school by eight and nine-year-olds who, at that age, often feel caught between peer pressure to be like their friends and their emerging awareness of personal developments in their inner lives. Such sharing, especially in a classroom setting, validates fantasy and dreams as socially acceptable activities; furthermore, it confirms the actual fantasies themselves as legitimate ways of questioning reality.

Interestingly, dramatic play did not work as a follow-up activity to WINDY DAY, despite the fact that the film is about dramatic play. The images the film evokes are personal and private ones, and the dramatic follow-up was nowhere near as successful as water colors; apparently each child needed to express her/his responses to the film in a special, particular way which ran counter to drama's requirement of cooperative group interaction. The group which used drama argued a lot--a clear indication that the activity did not suit the film.

In trying to determine what to look for in developing follow-up activities, I find that formulas--that is, if there is paint in the film, use painting as an activity--are unreliable. This became evident when I successfully tried a writing activity with another group after screening WINDY DAY. Since the film is about young children, I asked eight and nine-year-olds (in this third group) to think back to what it had been like when they were four. Since wind plays a powerful role in the film--causing shapes to change throughout--I asked children to remember how they felt about the wind when they were little. By now I was convinced that "I used to feel..." would be easier for them to handle than "I feel..." since it allowed a kind of distancing[1] which is essential to freeing children's self-expression and self-understanding. The results speak for themselves. One girl wrote: "I used to think the wind was a monster drifting along the sky. The wind used to scare me a little. I used to play with the wind. I pretended it was a dragon scaring me away." Her lack of self-consciousness--attributing anthropomorphic qualities to the wind--would have surprised me in a nine-year-old writing/talking about the here and now, since conceptually nine-year-olds know that the wind has no will of its own. However, many feelings from earlier stages are carried within each child (and adult) and the metaphor of "little me" gave her a comfortable vehicle for exploring those feelings.

In another child's writing, early fears of the wind surfaced as present fears quite directly: "I used to think the wind would blow me down, so I would wear a lot of clothes, so it would not blow me down. Now I know to wear a heavy sweater and jacket when it's a windy day, to hold me down, to hold my balance."

All the Right Answers

In selecting films I made bad as well as good choices, some of which I would like to share. There are several films (even series of films) currently being marketed which were made specifically to help children deal with problems and issues. I'M FEELING ALONE (distributed by Churchill Films) is one of these films. It is a three-minute, liveaction catalog of feelings; but there are no real characters or stories--only problems sketched briefly in dramatic vignettes. Children were asked, by the film's format, to identify feelings in the film and apply concepts about those feelings to their own lives. It was simply too much for the children with whom I screened it. One seven-year-old said she didn't like the film, "...because it's too much about feelings."

Another film, WHO DO YOU TELL? (distributed by Motorola Teleprograms Inc.) was made specifically, as the distributor's literature states, "...to encourage children to talk about their problems and concerns through the identification, recognition, and utilization of their family and community support systems." The activity guide accompanying the film presents users with questions and the correct responses. Although the cognitive information might be useful (for example, who to tell if you think your friend is a victim of child abuse), WHO DO YOU TELL? completely avoids the affective level of children's responses. It ignores the fact that children need room (distance) to play with ideas--especially threatening ones--and to test them out through fantasy. As Richard Jones says in

his helpful book, Fantasy and Feeling in Education, "...playfulness is inherent in the expression of feelings."[12] WHO DO YOU TELL? with it's capsuled situations and its right answers leaves no room for playful or divergent responses.

Numerous story films have the same limiting quality, despite their presentation of realistic situations and characters with more depth. MANDY'S GRANDMOTHER (distributed by Pheonix Films) is one such film. It is about a tomboy and her visiting grandmother, a woman who is lady-like, prim, and hates frogs. By film's end, girl and grandmother have worked out a "perfect" relationship. Once, after I had shown it in school, a nine-year-old's mother called me to say that her son was upset by the film because he was unable to work out his relationship with his grandparents; the idealized ending in MANDY'S GRANDMOTHER left him feeling both inadequate and cheated. Other children's reactions were less extreme; but, while they weren't disturbed by the film, neither were they excited by it. No particular energy was generated by the screening, and many children had difficulty becoming involved in dramatic play afterwards. They simply said they were bored.

Esthetic merit (or artistic integrity, if you like) has a great deal to do with response to a particular film--for children as well as for adults-- a point which Bettelheim also makes. He says that the fairy tale would not have such a strong impact on children "...were it not first and foremost a work of art."[13] None of the three films just discussed--I'M FEELING ALONE, WHO DO YOU TELL?, or MANDY'S GRANDMOTHER--were works of art. None lent themselves to follow-up activities. None were talked about by children at any later date. Their very patness seemed to cut off any real exploration of issues by children. In contrast, the unanswered questions which THE SAND CASTLE evoked were invitations to explore the film's ideas. Fifteen months after they had seen it, children still talked about THE SAND CASTLE.

A Surprising Richness

My recent experiences with THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE[14] embody everything I have learned so far. In the film, an Inuit (or Eskimo) folktale done in sand animation by Caroline Leaf, an owl and a goose fall in love, mate, and raise their young. Owl earnestly tries to become part of his goose family--he tries so hard to adapt--but in the end, being unable to swim like geese, he drowns.

Wonderfully kinesthetic, THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE is told with compelling visceral images and sounds consisting entirely of vocally created bird effects (that is, honking and wing flapping) and Inuit dialogue. Children's initial response was to imitate the sounds, both during and after the screening. Seven/eight-year-olds chanted "...kunicky, kunicky, kunicky" and called out imitatively "...flut, flut, flut"--for the sound of flapping birds' wings. During the image skim they recalled the nesting goose, the sad and shore-bound owl watching his family swim, and--in particular--the drowning owl.

Initially, I had planned a collage activity, to be followed later by poetry writing, as follow-up to the film, but during the screening of THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE, children's strong responses to its sound elements led me to offer them a choice of whether to begin with collage or with poetry.[15] The most vocal children chose poetry; the others chose to make black and white collages.

In giving children suggested structures for their poems, I recommended they might like to repeat words or lines the way some Native American poems do. I referred to In the Trail of the Wind,[16] a book of Native American poetry with which they were familiar. One third grader wrote:

"Kunicky, Kunicky Har Har Kunicky
The owl flies.
Ssssh Tick Tick Tick
The goose is swimming."

The above poem was that child's first really successful poem. Despite sloppy handwriting and weak spelling, he worked very hard on it. Naturally, he was proud of his accomplishment -- the success of which gave him his first real recognition as a writer and led to his writing a series of wonderful animal stories later on.

As another poetry making strategy for THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE, I asked children to list adjectives which described nouns they remembered from the film. The results were wonderful:

"The little, fat, furry owl
plopped in the water and drowned.
The sad, soft goose swam away.
The slippery, wet water wiggled."

Some children didn't require this sort of structuring to create their poems. One eight-year-old wrote:

"The owl has drowned.
I can hear the goose weeping softly in her heart.
She won't let it show on the outside,
She is too proud,
But I can hear her weeping."

That child could have been writing about herself. As a six-year-old she did cry a lot--especially during film screenings. The film and the poetry activity had given her a means to find a metaphor for expressing her sadness and her eight-year-old reserve.

I screened THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE with the same group several days later. Again, there was much flapping of arms and mouthing of sounds as the children watched. The poetry activity continued,[17] as did the making of black and white collages. Several children used their unglued collage pieces to make an animated film.

After two weeks of basing in-class writing and art projects on THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE, a whole new level of questions and explorations began to emerge. These new developments supported Bettelheim's observation that it takes "...distance and personal elaboration over time" before a child can identify with characters.

Several children thought the owl had been happy to die. One girl described the bubbles rising from the drowning owl in her collage as "happy bubbles." Another child wrote the following poem:

"The gentle, feathery, little owl
helped the goose make her nest.
The wet, happy owl drowned.
He wanted to drown."

When questioned about his poem, the author said, "The owl's eyes looked like he wanted to drown. The goose just watched, I'd only want to drown if I was a bug that got stepped on." Several children began to talk about this. "I'd rather die peacefully," said one child. "My aunt has cancer," said another. Teachers and children talked informally about these issues and questions as the children worked on their art or poetry. During this time children expressed aspects of their lives which might have been ignored had I followed the film with a more traditional discussion. It was also significant, I believe, that it took two weeks of playing with metaphors before the real issues in the film began to be sorted out and verbalized. Fortunately, the chil-

dren were given the time and allowed the "space" to play with their ideas--to fantasize, structure, restructure, and become comfortable with their questions.[18]

THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE and the activities which grew out of it exemplified the best aspects of my program at Calhoun. The film had a compelling story with themes relevant to children--birth, death, compatibility, loneliness, and adaptability--but its presentation allowed children a certain distance; it didn't announce itself as "a feelings film." It had, in addition, enormous esthetic appeal, both to children and adult viewers.

I had the feeling that somehow the Inuits who tell the tale and the filmmaker, Caroline Leaf, likewise used it as a way of asking questions--particularly since the film's ending opened up a questioning process instead of presenting a pat solution. The poetry activity worked because it allowed children to extend their interest in the film and to personalize its themes by using the characters metaphorically. This use of metaphor, in turn, gave children a certain distance from the material which "freed" their powers of expression. The repetitious poem structure I suggested initially fit well with the repetitious sounds in the film, and the black/white collages were simple and graphic like the imagery in the black/white film. This combination of film and activity really encouraged children to play with areas of concern, to see and to create metaphors which both described and articulated their feelings.

New Directions

With the generous support of my school's administration and the Claudia Curfman Castellana Memorial Fund (without which the project would have been impossible) I am halfway through my second year of using films and activities at Calhoun. Response has been extremely positive from children, teachers, and parents, and I plan to continue the program next year. One particularly interesting result is that, although the film/activity program was developed initially as a structured mechanism for dealing with the affective dimension of students' lives, many of the films I have used are now being incorporated by other teachers into Calhoun's more formal academic curriculum. And, although I have discussed the use of film/activities primarily as an exploration of feelings, this combination has enormous implications for cognitive learning as well.

SUN FLIGHT, for example, was used as part of a social studies unit on Greek myths for the third/fourth grade. The group's follow-up activities elaborated on the film/myth's themes in a way that made the experience more holistic than if they had simply read the myth or viewed the film without an art activity. Moreover, facts and details of the myth were remembered long after other myths had been forgotten or confused. The interplay of viewing, discussing, and creating art had encouraged both cognitive and affective (as well as imaginal) growth. Here was proof positive that children's natural instinct to play could be used as a way of incorporating new material.

In his book on developing a new approach to teaching social studies, Fantasy and Feeling in Education, Richard Jones says that the emotional aspects of a film are, at times, so compelling that children need time to sort out their feelings before they can deal with its cognitive aspects. Once, however, children are engaged through their feelings, Jones continues, their thinking is "...excited, interested, original, [and] inventive."[19] In working on this project, I have seen for myself that good films can stimulate real self-directed learning in children--about themselves and the world around them.

footnotes

1 B. Bettelheim. The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978.)

2 In their marvelously lucid book, A Guide to Reading Piaget (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), authors M. Brearley and E. Hitchfield explain Piaget's use of the term operate/operation as follows: "An operation is a means of organizing facts already internalized about the real world so that they can be used selectively in the solution of new problems."

3 See page 132, Erikson's developmental chart as adapted by R.M. Jones in Fantasy and Feeling in Education (New York University Press, 1968).

4 Although it deals with a non-narrative film, I would like to share with readers a specific example of children's use and understanding of metaphor. SKYE BOAT FOR BISCUIT (distributed by Serious Business Company) is a short film showing rain (via time-lapse photography) on a Monet-like lily pond; it was made--at least in part--as an homage to the death of the filmmaker's dog, a Skye terrier named Biscuit. After viewing the film, one nine-year-old said it was "...as if the clouds were crying." Another child said, "It doesn't have a story; it's more like a poem." These children intuitively understood the film and grasped that poetry can, as Archibald MacLeash said, "...make sense of experience" on a feeling level in a way that prose cannot. MacLeash's comment (from Poetry and Experience; Riverside Press, 1960) also applies to good narrative films which make sense of experience in a way that didactic films cannot.

Editor's note: That children can understand and use metaphor is further supported by Arthur N. Applebee and Richard M. Jones. In his book, Fantasy and Feeling in Education (New York University Press, 1968), Jones describes the symptoms of children's understanding. He says, on page 195, that their answers will be "...not only correct but convincing, by virtue of their inclusion of metaphor, allusion, paraphrase, and other signs, that, having found the subject in themselves, the children can put themselves into the subject." In The Child's Concept of Story: From Two to Seventeen (University of Chicago Press, 1978), Applebee says, on pages 24 and 25, that whatever our goal in educating children "...the arts remain one of our most important instruments. They are our mode of 'indwelling' ..., of ordering our mind and experience into a coherent and useful whole, an ordering that can only be done tacitly but which structures the whole of our active life."

5 Editor's note: Applebee, on page 17, op cit., makes an important point regarding the use of arts activities as follow-ups to literature. He comments that "...rarely, unless we ask for a story or poem in response, do we give students a chance to make...[a] connection between the experience of the work and other experiences with which they may be familiar." The same is true with films.

In "The Growth of Mind" (a paper from Beyond the Information Given: Studies in the Psychology of Knowing; W.W. Norton, 1973) Jerome S. Bruner discusses how to stimulate thought in children. He says:

> Children...need reassurance that it is all right... to treat a task as a problem where you invent an

answer rather than find one...in the book or on the blackboard. With children in elementary school, there is often a need to devise emotionally vivid ...games, story-making episodes, or construction projects to reestablish in the child's mind his [or her] right not only to have...private ideas but to express them in the public setting of a classroom.

6 The potential for generativity is probably the most important characteristic of a film that will work well with follow-up activities. Briefly, by generativity, I mean the ability to induce creativity, productivity, excitement, involvement, thought, and a process of investigation and questioning. A generative film, as Gaffney and Laybourne point out in the introduction to What To Do When The Lights Go On, energizes children. It may be only the beginning of a process, but such a film helps get the process going.

7 Bettelheim, op cit., says the fairy tale's great advantage over unstructured fantasies is that it has "...a consistent structure with a definite beginning and a plot that moves forward to a satisfying solution...at the end."

8 R. Lacey. Seeing with Feeling: Film in the Classroom. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972.)

9 In her book, Rosegarden and Labyrinth: A Study in Art Education (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), S.M. Robertson talks at length about how labyrinths, one of the most compelling symbols in the art work of older children, evoke themes of questing and dark mysteries. Work done from these themes, Robertson points out, has a sense of depth and significance that is "...powerful beyond the usual work of...children." For my fourth graders, the labyrinth which appeared in their art work confirmed its power as a compelling and important image.

10 G. Stein. Lectures in America. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1935.)

11 Editor's note: Applebee, on page 77, op cit., cites Edward Bullough's 1912 essay which introduced the notion of "psychical distance" to the study of literature. Bullough maintained that distancing helped both reader and artist "...reduce the threat posed by the material." Applebee then refers to the work of Norman Holland, who elaborates the concept of distancing and points out that "...partially by virtue of that separation, we ...become deeply involved in the ...experience because we know we will not have to act on it." In summing up its function on page 83, Applebee says that distancing is one way in which stories can be reduced to a manageable level; distancing "...provides a 'scene' of action whose implications will be less directly related to a person's central constructs [through which she or he interprets the story] and which will, as one result, be less complex to order and understand."

12 R.M. Jones. Fantasy and Feeling in Education. (New York: New York University Press, 1968.)

13 Bettelheim, op cit., page 12.

14 Interestingly, THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE works quite well to help children explore and deal with feelings despite the fact that its structure does not follow Bettelheim's fairly rigid schema for a successful folk fairy tale--a schema which may not apply as easily to folktales from non-European cultures as it does the Grimm's household tales.

Editor's note: In her article, "Folktales and Legends in Children's Films" (Previews, Vol. 7:1, September 1978), Marilyn Berg Iarusso, Storytelling Specialist for the New York Public Library, explains the difference between a fairy tale and a folktale. The terms, Iarusso says, are used interchangeably despite the fact that this is not a correct usage. "Fairy tale is a particularly imprecise term," Iarusso says, "in that it may be used to refer to a story from the oral tradition such as a tale collected by the Brothers Grimm, a classic literary creation such as a story by Hans Christian Andersen or Oscar Wilde, or a modern tale of magic like Margery Bianco's The Velveteen Rabbit." On the other hand, Iarusso continues, the folktale "...is a told story, the product of a particular culture, stripped down to essentials by generations of storytellers."

15 Learning to be flexible is one way to make such a program successful. It is better to follow the children's lead in these circumstances; they will have more enthusiasm and more real energy for the follow-up activity than if the teacher rigidly follows the lesson plan.

16 J. Bierhorst, editor. In the Trail of the Wind: American Indian Poems and Ritual Orations. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1971.

The book contains several Inuit (Eskimo) poems, all of which are thematically appropriate to use with THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE.

17 Auditory memory is not as strong as visual memory for second/third graders, and, although all children eventually wrote poetry as follow-up to THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE, those who wrote poems immediately following the screening incorporated many of the actual sounds from the film. Children who did their collages first and wrote poetry the following week were unable to recall the unusual sounds from the film after such a while.

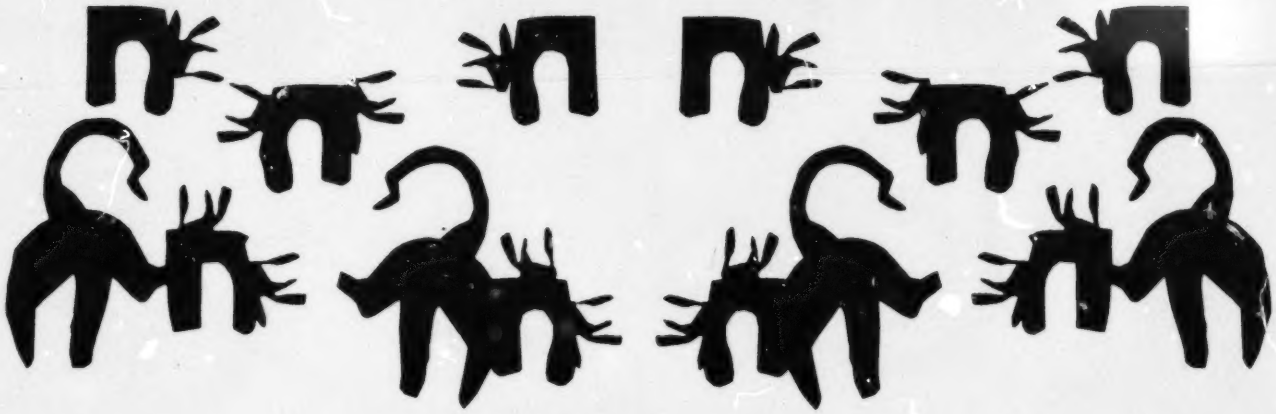
18 Most of Piaget's work is in reference to intellectual (cognitive) growth in children; however, in an early work, Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962.), he says, on page 205, that "...affective development is parallel to intellectual development and, like the latter, develops through the child's playfully testing out new situations and comparing them to an inner schema."

Bettelheim, op cit., makes a similar observation; he says that "...when a child tries to understand [her or] himself and others, or figure out what the specific consequences of some action might be, [that child]...spins fantasies around these issues." Bettelheim calls this the child's way of "playing with ideas" and concludes that it would only confuse and restrict a child if adults were to offer him or her rational thought as the child's major instrument for sorting out feelings and understanding issues.

19 Jones, op cit.

Editor's note: On page 91, op cit., Applebee suggests an approach to the teaching of literature which also applies to using film and related expressive activities with children. He defines the spectator role -- a term with interesting echoes of that dreaded phrase "passive viewer" although Applebee means quite a different thing -- as a role which in response to literature allows the reader to take in the whole work before being asked to judge it critically, to experience the work fully rather than acting on it piecemeal. What he calls the spectator role allows for the playful entertainment of the work, a response which Applebee suggests may be crucial to children's understanding, since "...there is good evidence that the giving of meaning is a slow, contemplative process involving significant changes over relatively long periods of time." Applebee sums up the function of the playful, embracing, spectator role on page 134: "[The] spectator role offers a way to articulate and explore our view of the world, presenting alternatives, clarifying dark corners, posing contradictions, reconciling conflicts within the realm of our subjective, personal experience." Then he adds, "The teacher's role in this process is one of questioning and cultivating response rather than one of teaching critical principles; the goals should be to illuminate and clarify the order in the world which the work seeks to capture and reflect."

Continued on page 15.



sinkenkong and kalamazoo

a media center film/activity evaluation

by merrill lee fuchs

In recent years, numerous people have asked to observe an MCC film/activity session with children -- with the idea, I guess, that one observation is worth a dozen explanations. Unfortunately, it is rarely possible to invite observers to our screenings since MCC evaluators are themselves guests in the in the schools cooperating in the Film Evaluation Program. Moreover, as most educators can corroborate, too many adults in a classroom -- and particularly strangers -- make children uncomfortable and can inhibit their spontaneity, the very thing we try to encourage in response to films.

MCC does, however, understand this desire on the part of interested adults and we recognize the value of first-hand observation. As a compromise between people's need to understand more clearly what we do and our test site limitations, we are herewith publishing a transcript of a film/activity session. To supplement this information -- and perhaps solve the problem -- we are also videotaping several sessions this Spring.

The session we will describe in this article was chosen because it illustrates a number of MCC techniques for using film with children; these techniques include:

- a scaffolding introduction
- talking out loud during the screening
- open-ended discussions after the film.

Special Techniques

A scaffolding introduction is a technique for focusing children's experience of a film without revealing -- and thereby usurping their discovery of -- the film's content. For the screening described here, the scaffolding involved playing with the auditory/kinesthetic qualities of the films' titles, KALEIDOFORM and MURATTI MARCHES ON, as a way of encouraging in children an esthetic/kinesthetic approach and response to the films.

In some film screenings, the scaffolding introduction is only used initially, as a "handle" for the film, and then discarded or forgotten; but in this session, it was woven throughout the entire film/activity experience in order to emphasize or set in relief the contrasts of shape, pattern, and movement between the two works.

Talking out loud during the screening -- particularly with nonverbal films -- is a method for actively engaging children as a group in the film experience. In dialoguing with their peers, children share and clarify their perceptions and understanding of the film and, as a result, have an enriched viewing experience. While watching KALEIDOFORM backwards, the child who exclaimed "It doesn't really matter if it's backwards!" was sharing an exquisite observation about the structure of the film.

This technique is very useful to adults who supervise the screening. In addition to serving as a barometer of how much children are enjoying and understanding the film, it provides information about which aspects of the film have most importance to the children. Such child-originated information can sometimes be incorporated into the follow-up activity as it was in the session recorded below. Since, in this instance, children said that MURATTI MARCHES ON was like a dance, the evaluator playfully reflected this idea back to the children in her instructions for the follow-up activity.

Open-ended discussions after the film which focus on the film's impact on children -- particularly regarding their feelings -- can function in many ways. When children reflect on films through discussion, this helps clarify and extend their experience of the film. In effect, children explain the film to each other, taking delight in their mutual associations and perceptions. When two films are paired because of some common or contrasting elements, the discussion which follows the screening can help children think analytically about the relationship between the films -- but only if the discussion is open-ended enough to allow children to express and share their actual feelings, thoughts, and observations. Often, as is shown in the transcript below, such a discussion becomes a "bridge" between the films and the post-screening activity.

KALEIDOFORM and MURATTI MARCHES ON were tested together during the Fall semester of 1980 in both museums and schools as part of the Media Center's Pilot Museum Film Evaluation Project. The purpose of these and other screenings was to explore how such films could be integrated into museum education and/or arts education programs.

Prior to the session documented here, KALEIDOFORM and MURATTI MARCHES ON had been tested in a variety of settings with different educational objectives and different activities. This pair of films was tried both with and without an introduction, with a collage follow-up activity using precut acetate shapes on large white paper to explore repetitive patterns, and with printing activities to explore the contrast of organic and inorganic shapes.

These tests met their objectives in varying degrees. By analyzing the screenings, MCC staff discovered a number of factors which influenced the success of the films in stimulating children's art work, as well as the success of the arts activities in illuminating the films. Sometimes, for example, the materials were not quite on a par with the visual and/or kinesthetic aspects of the films (see Jolly Uhry's article in this issue for further elaboration on this idea) -- a factor which diminished the possible connections between the films and the activity. In other cases, the activity/materials related well to one film but did not integrate the essence of both films.

We also found that without a proper "scaffolding" children had difficulty with the abstract nature of these films, particularly KALEIDOFORM. After many experiments, we realized that although both films were playing with shapes, colors, and movement, it was their contrasts rather than their similarity which was most evident when these films were screened together. From this analysis, we developed the scaffolding introduction and activity below.

Although it is true that MCC is somewhat unique in its latitude for experimentation, educators can also use experimentation positively -- and as a valid pedagogic technique without turning the children into guinea pigs -- if they adopt, and even involve their children in, a discovery approach to film use. For this approach, keeping a log of film/activity sessions (i.e., recording the children's responses to films, how the films were introduced, what activity was done, and how it worked) is a valuable tool for thinking about what worked or didn't work and why. In this way, even so-called failures become successes because they point to new possibilities for using the same, or different films. Certainly the same films can be used again with a different group of children -- informed by insights gleaned from the first screening; but it is also possible to use films again with the same group. By changing the focus of a screening, by pairing the film with another, different film, by varying the scaffolding and changing the activity, the film/activity session can become an entirely different creative viewing experience. We've found that children don't mind seeing a film again, particularly if they enjoyed it the first time. If the film is good as a work of art, children (like adults) often see more the second time around.

Film Screening Transcript: December 3, 1980

The film/activity session was conducted with eleven fifth graders at Barnard School, a small independent school in Washington Heights NY, with a culturally diverse child population. The objective of the screening was to help children perceive and explore visual and kinesthetic contrasts in shape, pattern, movement, and dynamics.

The first film was KALEIDOFORM, a four-minute nonverbal animation, done by Howard Danelowitz in intense poster-paint colors. In this meditative work, organic forms move, interact, and transform on-screen. Shapes appear to float in an outerspace/underwater environment accompanied by an eerie, synthesized electronic score. Though amorphous, the shapes are highly suggestive of both familiar and primordial images -- the cinematic equivalent of Arp's or Miro's paintings, or of Calder's mobiles. (For further information see the Film Review Supplement in this issue.)

The second film was MURATTI MARCHES ON, a four-minute nonverbal object animation by Oskar Fischinger. Animated objects are abstracted, choreographed in crisp geometric patterns, and anthropomorphized until they barely resemble cigarettes. Like the chorus line in a Busby Berkeley musical, they parade militarily to lively German march music, interweaving and regrouping until they descend some graduated steps. The music changes to a waltz and the cigarettes couple, turning and gliding like ice skaters. Even the cigarette boxes move, becoming banners in the parade and then scenery later on. The boxes rotate in full regalia at the end of the film like the climax of a Rockettes' performance. Coloration is starkly and monochromatically black and white except for accents of red on the boxes and the hats in the ice skating scene.

Note about transcription format: Throughout this transcript, children's verbatim responses are typed *in italics*. The evaluator's conversation with, and instructions to, the children are in quotation marks. The evaluator's observations and analyses are placed in parentheses and written without quotation marks since they were not verbalized to the children.

Introduction

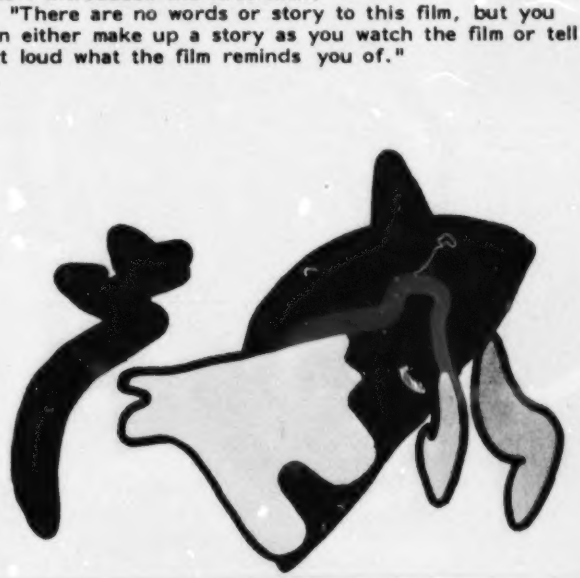
"The last time I was here I showed you two films that had to do with time. Before that I showed you two films that were portraits of brothers, and before that there were two films that had to do with feelings and color. Today, I'm going to show you two films that are pretty different from each other. Then we'll talk about how they are different and we'll do an art activity."

"The name of the first film is KALEIDOFORM. Let's talk about the title for a while because I think it will help you with this film. Can you think of some words that start the same way as kaleidoform?"

Kaleidoscope.
Collide.
Collage.
Collision.

(Observation: I wrote down their words on a large piece of paper as they said them. I showed them that kaleidoform was spelled like kaleidoscope and explained that kaleido- is a Greek prefix which means beautiful, while collide -- which sounds just like the Greek word -- is a Latin root meaning to strike or bump into. After this I introduced the first film.)

"There are no words or story to this film, but you can either make up a story as you watch the film or tell out loud what the film reminds you of."



11

A still from KALEIDOFORM

During the KALEIDOFORM Screening

(Observation: The children were totally engaged in this film and sat with their mouths slightly ajar as if transfixed. There was some talking, but it was minimal.)

Night.
Color!

(There were some smiles and low-key chatting.)

Ah, it's picking up off the ground.
There are so many colors.
Dinosaur.
Rainbow.
It's like changing and stuff.

"Do you want to see it again?" (I asked when the short film ended.)

Backwards! (So I screened it backwards.)
Is this fast motion or slow? Slow.
It's like everything going back to earth.
A watermelon and a frankfurter.
It doesn't really matter if it's backwards!
It's like slow motion.
It sounds like a space movie.
The black hole -- the red hole.
It reminds me of Saturn. (Referring to the aqua shape that encircled itself with an arm.)

(Observation: The children were just as engaged and attentive watching it backwards, but, interestingly, they were more verbal than during the initial screening forwards.)

Post-screening Discussion of KALEIDOFORM

"What images or sounds do you remember from the film?"

Sounds were neat. Like empty. Like outer space.
Every different color went into the red ball.
Like things going into a black hole.
Looked like a dinosaur.
The little figures looked like a dinosaur.
The little man in the beginning looked like he was doing ballet.

"Well, I guess you actually told me what the film reminded you of. How did you feel inside while you watched the film?"

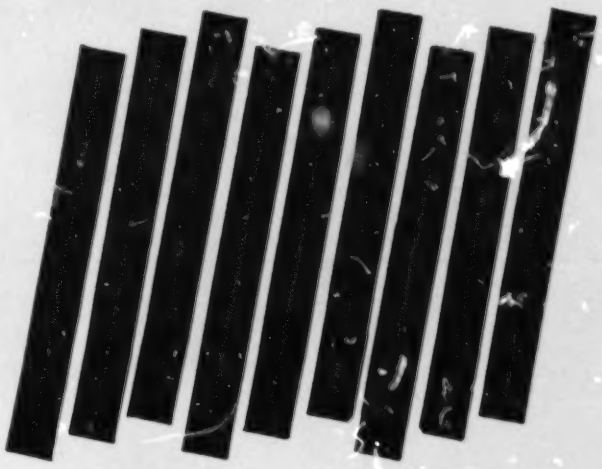
Like if you were in a space rocket going around seeing colors.
Wierd. All the colors were going into other colors. It was very different than any of the other films you've shown us.
The music made me feel like I was alone.
Like I blacked out in outer space and had a wierd dream.

"Do you think KALEIDOFORM is an appropriate title for this film?"

Yes, because there were many colors, beautiful colors.
Yes, things were floating around.
You know collide on a highway? Well, the colors were colliding into each other.
But that's not the main reason. It's because the colors were beautiful.

"Let's rate the film." (There were no terribles, three okays, eight goods, and no supers.) "Say KALEIDOFORM slowly so that the word rolls out of your mouth. Can you use your hands to show how the word sounds?" (The children did fluid, rolling motions with their hands and arms.) "The title of the next film is MURATTI. Say MURATTI. Clap MURATTI. Does MURATTI feel like the word KALEIDOFORM?" (One child said MURATTI was more lively.) "Do the same thing with MURATTI. Say what it reminds you of. There are no words or story."

A simultation of images from MURATTI...



During the MURATTI Screening

(Observation: Many "Ah's" when the film started.)

Cigarettes.
Looks like the Rockettes.
Looks like someone's head's been chopped off. (Referring to tips of cigarettes.)
Is this a long one? (A few children asked about this. It seemed as if they wanted to know how long they were going to be treated to this film.)
This is so neat.
I like this.
This reminds me of happiness.
(Children were very attentive.)
Ice skating.
Look at that. That's so beautiful!
When they go by you see the little lines. (Referring to path of a cigarette on red skating rink.)
Oh, the sun!
Is Muratti a cigarette?

Post-screening Discussion of MURATTI

(Children asked to see it backwards.) "OK, if we have time later." (Hands were raised immediately after the film ended.)

"Comments?"

It looked like cigarettes were dancing.
It looked like in a parade march.
More cigarettes joined and it became a bigger group.
Like they were doing a show.
They acted like real people.
Like the Rockettes.
Like an army.

"How did the film make you feel inside?"

Happy. The music was happy.
It made me feel like moving around and dancing.
There was more music and livelier than the other film.
It woke me up.
Happy because of the music and the way they were dancing.

"Do you think this title was appropriate to the film?"

It matched.
The name sounds lively like the music.
Tania took my answer.

"Let's rate the film."
(There were no terribles, no okays, nine goods, and two supers.) "Lately we've been talking about how the films are the same. Today let's talk about how these films are different, or the same, and then we'll do an art activity."

The first was lonelier and slower but so many bright colors. The second was like dancing.

"So you are describing the feeling of the films."

Both didn't have words but both had music. The first had constantly changing colors and the second had a set of colors that stayed the same.

"You've mentioned the feeling and the colors of the films. What about the shapes?"

Looked like legs of people and the second was cigarettes.
The first film had shapes like blobs and the second film had shapes like toothpicks — skinny.
The first had changing shapes. In the second the shapes stayed the same.
The first was brighter.

"What about the arrangement of the shapes, how they moved around?"

The kaleidoforms were floating around and bumping. The cigarettes were marching.
The cigarettes moved faster.
In KALEIDEFORM the forms got bigger and went in whichever direction they pleased. In MURATTI they were all straight and didn't bend. They were proud and gay.

The Follow-up Activity

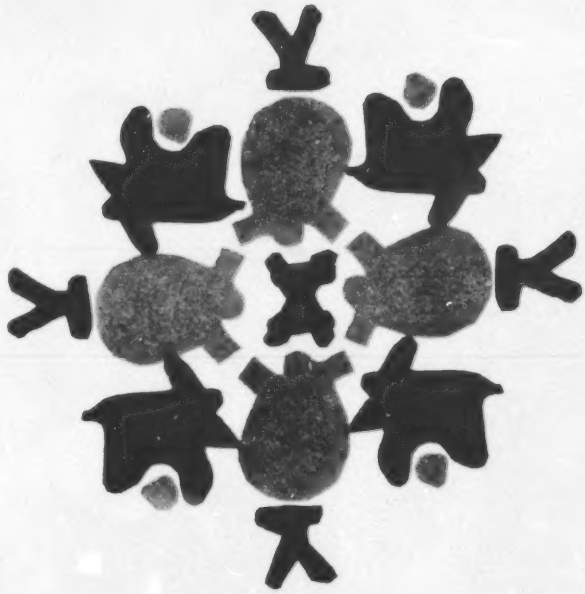
Materials for the activity consisted of six- or seven-inch squares of origami paper in many bright and intense colors, glue, pencils, scissors, and nine-by-twelve-inch white bond paper. I picked up a sheet of origami paper and asked children how to solve a problem. "Suppose I had this piece of paper and I wanted to get four or six or eight shapes that were exactly the same. How could I do it?" Children suggested tracing the shape over and over, and/or drawing one shape on the paper and cutting several layers at a time.

"We are going to make collages and combine 'a piece' of each film. I want you to cut out KALEIDOFORM type shapes and arrange them on your paper in a MURATTI kind of dance -- in a repeating pattern. The hitch is that each shape has to touch at least one other shape; they have to collide just like in KALEIDOFORM. I will give you three different colors of paper; you should cut out several forms of the same shape in each color. One color should have a large KALEIDOFORM shape; one color should have a small KALEIDOFORM shape; and one color may be any size KALEIDOFORM."

When the children were almost finished with their collages, I suggested that they think of a name for their dance. "Make up a nonsense word that sounds like your dance looks, just as MURATTI and KALEIDOFORM sounded like the films looked." Two of their titles, "SinkenKong" and "Kalamazoo," make up the title of this article. Others were "Heartafari Shape," "Shamrock," "Ohhie O Wang," and "Peoplezola."

Evaluation of the Film/Activity Session

Children really enjoyed both the films and the activity. They were unconcerned about "understanding" the film and seemed to accept the experience on an esthetic level. A few children called KALEIDOFORM wierd, but, as is obvious from the discussion, wierd meant unusual, not that they didn't like the film.



In addition, children were quite taken by the shapes, colors, and mood of KALEIDOFORM, and the lively, dancing arrangements (technique) of MURATTI. These were exactly the aspects I asked the children to combine in their collages, so the films worked well together and were great as a stimulus for the art activity.

The children were centered and eager to start the art activity when the films ended. Most did strikingly beautiful collages, really exploring both shapes and patterns. The materials were perfectly suited to the colors and visual appearance of the films, and they appealed to the children. The three boys in the group, who sometimes do very similar work, or seem shy during the activity/discussions, did spectacular collages; they were quiet during the KALEIDOFORM discussion, but very talkative during the MURATTI discussion.

Children had no trouble understanding what they were to do. One or two didn't want to be confined by only three shapes and colors, and diverged from the initial assignment somewhat, but they still worked with enthusiasm and care.

It seemed that the title scaffolding was effective in focusing children on the feeling of the films and on the contrast of shapes, movement, and mood. They enjoyed titling their own "dances" and some devised wonderful nonsense names that captured the feel of their dance.

Playing with titles will not, however, work for every film or pair of films. It worked well with MURATTI MARCHES ON and KALEIDOFORM because the kinesthetic sound/image of those titles closely paralleled the kinesthetic feeling/impact of the films, a factor which may have been intended by the filmmakers. MURATTI MARCHES ON was originally produced in 1932 by Oskar Fischinger as a German cigarette commercial; in advertising the brand, he probably had to consider the sound of the product's name. KALEIDOFORM seems to be a verbal/visual pun since the title's Greek prefix, kaleido, describes the colorful visual appearance of the film, while its Latin root, collide, (a homophone for kaleid) describes the movement of the images.

Judging from their verbal responses and art work, I think children would have an enhanced understanding (empathy, appreciation) of the work of Calder, Miro, Arp and Mondrian if they saw this work in a museum after viewing the films and doing the arts activity.

The artwork on page nine is by Eugene Chayevsky (although we doubled it and reversed the original to make "mirror images"); that on page twelve is by Anna Nikolayevsky. Both collages were done in the session described above.

a doll, a truck, a loving adult going beyond critical viewing

by barbara weber

During the 1980 winter holidays, on the third day at grandma's house, Emily and Rebecca, my twin three year old nieces were restless. It was too cold to go outside and everything -- toys, games, hiding places and relatives, had been played with again and again. As a last resort, we tried watching an edited version of the film, BORN FREE, on television. The girls' mother and I sat on the couch, the twins on the carpeted floor.

Rebecca, still feeling the effects of a recent bout with the flu, quickly went upstairs with my sister-in-law. Emily stayed to watch the movie. All went well until some frightening scenes came on the screen; I began to get worried since I had given Emily no warning about them.

To my surprise, Emily with her doll in hand climbed into my lap and announced, "My doll is scared, so I think we'll sit here now." I held her close and we talked about the film. I explained what was happening and she expressed her feelings. She sat through the entire movie, commercials and all, and when we turned off the TV set, Emily picked up her toy truck, pointed it at me and said, "Bang, bang." She pretended we were in the jungle. We took turns being trees, hunters, baby lions, mommy lions, and daddy lions. During these games she chattered nonstop about the movie, acting out responses.

For Emily, simply verbalizing what she had seen was not enough since her responses were more than intellectual. She had emotional responses as well and needed to work them out both in physical and verbal ways. Her doll, her truck, and me -- a loving adult -- became avenues by which she was able to make sense out of what she'd seen. I wondered what would happen to these needs once Emily went to school where, typically, we start expecting children to keep their feelings outside of the classroom?

Bringing Feelings Into the Classroom

If an education system focuses purely on cognitive development, what happens to children's other, equally important, developing areas? If the goals of education are to include "educating the whole child," then feelings must become a part of that education. In his wonderfully prescient book, Seeing With Feeling, Richard Lacey makes an interesting case for using media as a means of bringing feelings into the classroom.

> Recently we have been focusing our attention on how education might provide new, more humanistic, responsive learning environments. Film study, a promising beginning, is part of a widening movement toward sensitivity training in its broadest possible meaning: using and sharpening all of the senses, acknowledging and dealing with feelings as well as ideas, and becoming increasingly open to possibilities in experiencing, learning, and growing.
>
> This approach...to the use of film means that our classroom activities should concentrate upon the child's perceptions and [her or] his growing sense of self.[1]

It wasn't until my last semester at CUNY/Hunter that I encountered a professor who included feelings in the curriculum. In studying the short story, Professor Leonard Albert often asked students to describe how a story made us feel. At first it was difficult to approach studying literature in this way; eventually, however, we discovered that by looking at our feelings, as well as the more traditional avenues of analysis, we developed a better understanding of what does and doesn't work in a story. I learned more about writing in that literature class than in all the writing workshops I ever took elsewhere. As psychologist Richard Jones says, "A teacher's lesson plans should regularly include exercises which encourage and reward interesting as well as right responses. This is no more than to underscore what has long been obvious to students of creativity. Namely, that creative thinking involves divergent as well as convergent thinking; the formation of concepts as well as the attainment of concepts. In short, invention as well as discovery."[2]

Bringing feelings into the classroom makes students and teachers partners in explorations of the unknown and this, in itself, can breathe life into stale lesson plans. "If real education consists of helping students develop ways of dealing with unknowns then working flexibly, spontaneously and creatively is a crucial part of the learning experience. By keeping the lesson plans flexible the teacher can concentrate on group response and work to create a more relaxed and confident environment."[3]

Achieving This Important Goal

Nancy King's book, Giving Form to Feeling, discusses feelings in the context of incorporating arts activities into the curriculum. One of the important by-products of arts activities, she tells us, is that they help children, and adults, learn to not be afraid of taking risks or of failing. "Stressing exploration rather than achievement relieves the pressure of finding a perfect ending for each activity. Grades, evaluation and criticism which focus on results tend to inhibit people and keep them from trying new things."[4]

If they are not afraid to take risks, students learn how to explore and grow. Thus, they develop a sense of who they are and this awareness helps them to become full human beings.

> The development of a sense of identity is at the heart of the psychology of film response. When we see a movie and empathize with characters or respond to situations, we temporarily adopt new roles. In various ways, the process of experimenting with unfamiliar roles is how we grow psychologically...Assuming various roles is the process by which we establish a sense of connectedness with others. Since this sense grows from empathy, the film experience is one kind of contribution to the process by which a student develops...[an] awareness of being part of the human community.[5]

Happily, King does more than talk about the benefits for teachers; she clearly explains how these benefits can be achieved -- about half of her book is made up of carefully described instructions for movement and drama. It should be noted, however, that King's book is best for young children, since students in junior high are less inclined to participate in activities of the kind she suggests. Lacey's book (which I will describe below) concentrates on verbal responses and is best for older students from junior high through college. Aspects of each book can nonetheless be adapted to upper and lower ages; each is a wonderful resource for teachers.

A Means to New Ends

When Richard Lacey talks about using film in the classroom, it should be made clear from the very start that he is not talking about using film in the traditional "educational" way. He focuses, instead, on how film can be most effectively used. "Movies are constantly justified as means to ends already established by traditional subjects," Lacey points out. "[Unfortunately, film].. does not communicate in the same way printed literature does, despite its superficial resemblance to drama and fiction..... When movies are taught deductively or as if they were literature, the interaction -- of art -- is lost in translation."[6]

Seeing With Feeling emphasises the use of film as a means of bringing feelings into the classroom. Like King, Lacey gives practical guidelines, the primary goal of which is to help students learn how to "see" by using their emotions and their minds. Lacey's most interesting device is the image-sound skim, "the basis of a collaborative approach to systematically integrating feelings and intuition with intellectual concerns"[7] -- a method that helps students avoid falling into the old school game of giving the teacher what they think the teacher wants instead of expressing their own feelings. The general theory behind the image-sound skim is drawn largely from the works of Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, and Carl Rogers. Lacey's theory holds that "an individual learner 'knows' at any moment what he [or she] needs to know and can learn, and that in a supportive environment he [or she] will pursue his [or her] own learning energetically."[8]

When I worked as a film evaluation intern for the Media Center for Children, we used the image-sound skim in our testing and it worked very well. At first children would be unsure of how to respond because they were still looking for the "right" answer. But after assuring them in the initial sessions that there was no right answer -- we wanted their real responses to the film -- the image-sound skim became an effective way to help them explore their own feelings. "The device loosens kids up by giving everybody a chance to talk without fear of being wrong, and to encourage them to think in terms of the film itself...As images and sounds are recalled, they prompt other images and sounds by association, and students...reorchestrate the movie... and learn how others in the class perceive."[9]

To achieve a good discussion, Lacey explains that teachers must learn how to be facilitators. He says, "a teacher must do more than moderate [the] discussion. A moderator typically maintains and encourages orderly, sometimes lively discussion, trying to get everyone involved while sticking to the topic. Usually he or she does not actively participate in this discussion...Facilitation, on the other hand, encourages collaboration. A facilitator...is...personally involved in the discussion."[10]

Lacey understands the anxiety of teachers attempting a new program and he addresses these problems: "The purpose of this book is to provide some approaches for all teachers to use in expanding their own repertoires of behavior, so that even though they may feel most comfortable in a traditional framework, they can also work effectively in unconventional situations...Nothing is prescriptive. I am presenting a focus which readers can use as a starting point."[11]

Taking Critical Viewing One Step Further

As Ben Logan says in the introduction to Television Awareness Training, the advent of television proved to be a kind of bloodless revolution. Like it or not, it is here to stay. And, if we stop and think, we realize how long ago this revolution took place. "This revolution, called television, that started without me, this odyssey into the unknown for which we had no leader and no map, is now thirty years old. We can no longer play the game of innocence."[12]

Different researchers express various views as to how we should regard our relationship with television. But no matter what their view is, most researchers agree that television should not be taken passively, in large quantities, without thought to what is being watched. "Despite all [its problems]," Logan says, "I don't think television is a monster." It is simply "a screen full of dots. I don't think the people who program TV are monsters, either, though I plan to keep yelling at them to give me dots that add up to better programs." All that's left, then is the viewer "and I don't think we're monsters either," Logan concludes. However, if viewers watch television "carelessly, non-selectively, blindly, then a monster is being created."[13]

Viewers can also create monsters by leaving all awareness of feelings out of what they're watching. Media, including film and television, evoke emotional responses. Unfortunately, as Maureen Gaffney points out in her workshops, too many of the current television awareness or critical viewing programs center on the cognitive elements of awareness, particularly the technical and sociological aspects of television programs (violence, stereotypes, etc.). While they don't dispute the importance of this kind of awareness, Gaffney and the staff of the Media Center are upset because it does not go far enough. I keep thinking about Emily who, by following her instincts, responded to television with all of herself -- mind, body and heart!

> Kids should react directly to a movie; that is, they should react with feelings as well as thought to get the most out of the experience. Moreover, if they feel compelled to intellectualize about the movie [or television program], they will miss the experience.[14]

Giving Form to Feeling by Nancy King and Seeing With Feeling by Richard Lacey are good places to start a new kind of media revolution -- one that puts feelings into the curriculum. This is especially important when technological media are being studied by young human beings. These books, combined with those by Applebee and Jones[15] (which will be reviewed in a later issue of Young Viewers), can form the foundation of a new approach to media and its use in education. It may be only a beginning, but there's no better place to start.

---

footnotes

[1] Richard A. Lacey, Seeing With Feeling: Film in the Classroom. (New York: W. B. Saunders Co., 1972), pp. 2-3

[2] Nancy King, Giving Form to Feeling. (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1975), p. 49

[3] King, p. 86

[4] King, p. 66

[5] Lacey, p. 3

[6] Lacey, p. 11

[7] Lacey, p. 26

[8] Lacey, p. 28

[9] Lacey, pp. 24-25

[10] Lacey, p. 44

[11] Lacey, p. 45

[12] Ben Logan & Kate Moody, Editors: Television Awareness Training: The Viewers Guide for Family and Community. (New York: Media Action Research Center, 1979), p. 11

[13] Logan, p. 11

[14] Lacey, p. 18

[15] Arthur N. Applebee, The Child's Concept of Story: Ages Two to Seventeen. (University of Chicago Press, 1978)
Richard M. Jones, Fantasy and Feeling in Education. (New York University Press, 1968)

operating on metaphor continued

Artwork on pages six, seven and fifteen is from the film THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE.

filmography

ABYSS by Gilbert Dassonville/1974
(17 minutes/liveaction/narration)
A mountain climber slips and plunges hundreds of feet before his rope catches him. Eventually he manages to pull himself back up to his climbing partner. Filmed as if it were a documentary, during the screening children kept asking, "It's real, isn't it?" The fall, done in painfully slow motion, is mesmerizing. The film works best with third grades on up. (Distributed by Phoenix Films, NYC.)

After the film, children spontaneously discussed what the climber might have been thinking during his fall. After they talked, we took polaroid pictures of children imitating the climber's facial expressio as he fell. Others generated ideas about scary situations nd we took more pictures.

THE FABLE OF HE AND SHE by Eliot Noyes/1974
(11 minutes/clay animation/narration & dialogue)
The Hardibars and Mushamels work together in stereotypically male/female roles. When their island splits apart, they are forced to define their roles more flexibly. Quite playful, the film can be used with a wide range of ages -- preschool through grade six, although each age "gets it" on different levels. (Distributed by Learning Corporation of America, NYC.)

A perennial favorite with Calhoun children, they ask to see it again and again. One activity which has worked well with the film is inventing and building cultures with plasticene. Children are divided into small groups and each group is asked to make up a society with particular rules for "male" and "female" jobs. This usually produces heated -- and revealing -- discussions which make good leads to additional activities and other areas to explore.

FIELD REPORT 27/3ES/025 by Barbara Wilk/1979
(6 minutes/liveaction/narration)
A mock anthropological study of silent clay figures found hiding in a mysterious wooded area, this film ends with an apparent death (by murder? by accident?) and leaves many unanswered questions. We used it successfully with grades two through five. One theme which emerges is fear of the unknown. (Distributed by Barbara Wilk, Westport CT.)

After the screening children made clay creatures decorated with feathers, beads, yarn and cloth. We took these figures outside (still damp) and set them near the entrance to the school, each in its own hiding place. Children spoke with glee about how people would respond when they saw the figures. Since children felt that the filmmaker played a joke on them by making her film so elusive, they were delighted to be able to play a similar joke on others.

HANSEL AND GRETEL, AN APPALACHIAN VERSION by Tom Davenport/1975
(16 minutes/liveaction/narration & dialogue)
Distributed by Davenport Films, Delaplane VA.

I'LL FIND A WAY by Beverly Shaffer/1978
(26 minutes/liveaction/narration & dialogue)
Nadia De Franco has spina bifida, a crippling disease which has kept her in a special school. This documentary revolves around her feelings in preparing to enter a so-called normal school. The film brings up many questions about handicaps and is fine for first graders on up. (Distributed by the Media Guild, Solano Beach CA.)

Since I wanted to extend the film's documentary quality I asked children to act out their version of Nadia's first day at Calhoun, which we videotaped. Children improvised their efforts to make her feel at ease. In roleplaying, many themes emerged (Nadia's not wanting to be pitied, other children's confusion about her handicap, and her remarkable spunk), themes that had come up in the film. I found S. Stein's book, About Handicaps (Walter, 1974), enormously helpful with its sections for children and other sections for adults.

THE OWL WHO MARRIED A GOOSE by Caroline Leaf/1976
(8 minutes/sand animation/nonverbal)
Distributed by Churchill Films, Los Angeles CA.

RAPUNZEL, RAPUNZEL by Tom Davenport/1978
(15 minutes/liveaction/narration & dialogue)
Another wonderful Tom Davenport fairytale film in which the witch becomes the victim of her own need to keep Rapunzel a little girl. Younger children loved the scary parts and talked a great deal about the witch afterwards. The romantic aspects appealed to fourth and fifth grade girls. (Distributed by Davenport Films, Delaplane VA.)

With third graders I took a long section of mural paper and divided it into sections based on the film's plot. Each child chose a section to work on and together the group made a progression of scenes which read like a giant comic book. Each child seemed to pick the section which provoked her/his concerns. An important issue which came out as children worked was whose fault was it that the baby was handed over to the witch. Could her mother have controlled her urge for greens? Could her father have said "No!" to save the child? -- this all came out as children painted on their comic book/mural.

THE SAND CASTLE by Co Hoedeman/1977
(14 minutes/clay animation/nonverbal)
Distributed by National Film Board of Canada, NYC.

SOLO by Mike Hoover/1972
(15 minutes/liveaction/nonverbal)
Distributed by Pyramid Films, Santa Monica CA.

SUN FLIGHT by Gerald McDermott/1966
(6 minutes/cutout animation/nonverbal)
Distributed by McDermott Films, New Milford CT.

TCHOU TCHOU by Co Hoedeman/1972
(15 minutes/block animation/nonverbal)
A visually pleasing and playful film in which a dragon interrupts the lives of two children made of blocks. It can be quite scary for very young children, but they love it. Bad dreams emerge as a recurring topic whenever this film is discussed. (Distributed by Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation, Chicago IL.)

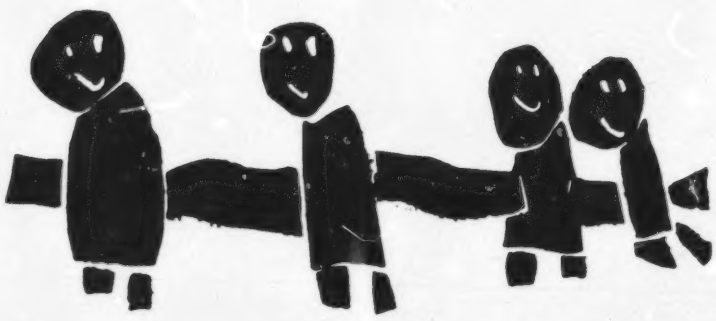
I felt it was important to allow children to continue to "play" with the idea of the dragon after seeing the film, so first and second graders each painted part of the dragon on a large piece of oaktag. Later, they all lined up, each holding her/his section, to form a scary dragon.

WILLIAM by Tony Frangakis/1973
(15 minutes/liveaction/dialogue)
William escapes from a crowded picnic and a highly competitive baseball game to walk alone in the woods. Later on, his interest in nature helps him find a lost ring. When he becomes a hero for this, his feelings about his new role are ambivalent. (Distributed by Franciscan Communications Center, Los Angeles CA.)

Elementary school children of all ages loved it, but third and fourth graders were particularly sensitive to the subtleties of William's feelings -- both his need to be alone in nature and his need to be accepted -- feelings which were in conflict with each other. Peer pressure and personal integrity are big issues for children at that age.

As a follow-up we made stick puppets and children acted out various scenes from the film. The crowd scenes really affected the children because their replay of those episodes with the puppets were quite brutal. The ending raised questions which children resolved by acting them out.

WINDY DAY by John and Faith Hubley/1968
(10 minutes/cel animation/dialogue)
Distributed by Films Incorporated, Wilmette IL.



young viewers

Number 4: Spring 1981

film review supplement

FIELD REPORT 27/3ES/025 by Barbara Wilk 6 min liveaction/narration (Barbara Wilk/USA) 1979

FIELD REPORT opens with the image of a hand writing on the cover of an anthropological report. In a flashback, the film cuts to a rushing stream surging through a forest. Water hits the rocks and sprays foam in all directions. An unseen female narrator says, "I was being watched," as a clan of small primitive-looking clay dolls are seen on and among the rocks. Elephants, camels and other clay animals occupy this shrub-covered terrain along with the people, who are dressed in exotic costumes of cowrie shells, stones, feathers, and cloth. Gazing impassively outward, they seem to confirm the narrator's statement, "They didn't seem hostile, nor did they seem friendly." The creatures' simple, silent presence creates an aura of mystery.

The narrator reports that she discovered this "civilization" on the first day she visited the site. When she returned the second day, it had disappeared without a trace. "This...was their place," she says. Once again there is an image of the rushing brook, while an eerie recorder is heard on the soundtrack.

As the narrator wonders aloud who these people were, there is a piercing scream. Drums, and possibly shots, are heard, along with the screech of birds. Then, a primitively-dressed figure floats downstream. As the film ends, there is a brief montage of clay figures in the woods. The sound of a drum heightens the mood of suspense.

When we screened the film without an introduction, children had widely divergent views of what FIELD REPORT was about. Although it generated much speculation about who the people were and where they went, without an introduction the viewing experience seemed unsatisfactory -- incomplete -- and the ending was simply confusing.

Actually, the film requires more than an introduction; it requires context and worked best with arts activities. Since viewers were intrigued by the clay figures, the film was most successful when children created their own miniature environments for box art or their own small clay civilizations as a follow-up to the screening. See Jolly Uhry's article in this issue for an example of a successful sculpture activity which closely paralleled and played with the film's concept.

FIELD REPORT is fine for art activities with small groups in schools and museums. It could also be an interesting lead-in to storytelling with children aged eight and up.

L.S.

JERRY'S RESTAURANT by H.S. Potter 12 min liveaction (Encyclopaedia Britannica/USA) 1977

It's lunchtime in downtown Chicago. People crowd the sidewalks. The camera zooms in on the outside of a deli/restaurant. Once inside, viewers are engulfed by the chaos: people rushing in and out, orders shouted over the counter, sandwiches being made and wrapped, laughter, yelling, and in the center of it all, Jerry, the middle-aged owner of this bustling eating establishment.

Jerry himself narrates this documentary about his restaurant. He tells us that he is a man who must keep moving; what goes on in the restaurant seems partly a gimmick and partly an extension of his personality. Jerry's customers are working people who do not want to spend much time or money on lunch. So Jerry gives them good food at low prices with the motto, "If you're not served in three minutes, you get your food for free." In over twenty years, Jerry has never had to give away a free lunch.

His employees ("the best") make and serve the food while Jerry expedites the ordering by taking customers by the hand, yelling at them, telling jokes, and pushing them to the front of the line. The deli's chaos doesn't bother Jerry's customers (who keep coming back) nor, does it bother his employees -- most have been with him for over ten years. Despite the histrionics, we sense that Jerry is not as brusque as he appears.

The film contains some technical problems -- a blackout midway through the film and some occasional blurriness, but, in all, is generally well done. It works well with children in grades five and up, but it presented real difficulties for younger viewers, who were bothered by the yelling and were unable to understand what the film was about. A group of gifted second graders said, "I wouldn't like to go there...; it lets kids hear how grown-ups holler at each other...; they made it to teach kids to be noisy." Another second grade class commented: "He's a madman...; he screamed too much...; he screamed because people were asking him for things."

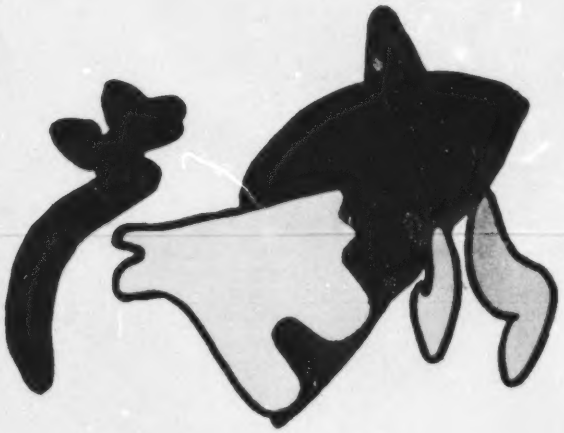
In the third grades, children were somewhat less upset by the yelling and were able to appreciate some of the humor, though they were bored and restless through much of the film. Fourth and fifth graders understood the movie far better and took "the yelling" less seriously: "I got a kick out of it...; he likes people -- he treated them like family...; he couldn't make me talk -- I'd be

quiet for five minutes and get a free lunch...; people weren't bothered by him...; they weren't taking him seriously.

Older children enjoyed JERRY'S RESTAURANT. It stimulated a great deal of discussion about food, people, restaurants and Jerry. The screenings were more successful when we introduced the film by saying: "Is this film a portrait or not?" This also helped prepare kids for the lack of storyline. JERRY'S RESTAURANT would work well as part of a program on portraits, character studies, or jobs, and would be a good lead-in to discussions about human behavior.

B.W.

Correction: In the last Film Review Supplement (no. 3), the score in DAYBREAK EXPRESS is "Daybreak Express" by Duke Ellington. It was the first American composition to incorporate machine noises as musical effects.



A still from KALEIDOFORM

KALEIDOFORM by Howard Danelowitz 4 min
nonverbal/animation (Picture Start/USA) 1975

Beautiful, bright-colored shapes dance before the viewer's eyes in what could be a moving abstract painting. Fat, balloon-like letters float in "from the wings" to form the title. They waver in mid-air until the letter "k" separates from the rest. It transforms into different shapes and is joined by other shapes--masses of intense color which alter and reshape on-screen. The organic forms expand, deflate, and collide throughout the film. Their slow "suspended" motion, coupled with the film's eerie electronic music, creates the illusion of underwater or outer space. Near the end, the film goes in reverse. The appealing Arp-like shapes retrace their actions backwards; but instead of going to the film's very beginning, a shape that looks, as one child said, like a "Yellow Pages finger doing the walking" becomes the letter "r" in the final credits. When it's over, there is a small sense of loss as when a butterfly which landed briefly flies away.

KALEIDOFORM evoked wonderful image/associations from young viewers with body, food, and outer space references most common. Children saw everything from "teeth with cavities," "germs," "carrots with feet," "black holes," "marshmellow clouds," and an "upside down bird" to a "ballet dancer without a head." For some children the saftig shapes evoked textural and kinesthetic references: "little mushy things of different colors," "like play dough."

Children, like adults, sometimes have difficulty with electronic scores. KALEIDOFORM's sound track received its share of "wierds" and "funnies," but children also described it in stunningly evocative terms: "bubbling music," "ghost music--spooky," and "hollow music." Some young viewers didn't regard the soundtrack as music at all; one fourth grader said that parts sounded like "a stick hitting a can." Another child in the same class said parts sounded like "earthworms swishing in water."

Most conceptual films we've tested, particularly those which, like KALEIDOFORM, lack words or a narrative structure, need a special context and/or scaffolding introduction to work with children. Even though young viewers may be totally absorbed in the film during the screening, they often criticize it afterwards. This happened with KALEIDOFORM when we tested it initially, as we usually do, with no introduction and no follow-up activity. Children said there was "no point to the story," that they were "bored." One third grader exclaimed in consternation, "I don't know what those things were!" With a little help from a scaffolding introduction before the screening (see Merrill Lee Fuchs' article in this issue), children accepted the idea that "those things" could be anything they imagined.

Children seemed particularly fascinated by the movement of the forms. They described them as "things go inside each other," "things go together and apart." One child said the shapes were "colliding--sometimes in a pattern and sometimes all over the place." Most children didn't try to explain the film, however, when asked, a fourth grader said the film showed "how things split and come together like molecules."

Since KALEIDOFORM's colors are vibrant and deeply saturated, it's an ideal lead-in for activities which involve color; it's also great for collage. Though we tested the film with graphic arts activities only, it could also work with sound and movement activities. Given the richness of children's descriptions, KALEIDOFORM could also be used to inspire poetry. Though it would need careful programming, KALEIDOFORM could easily be part of a sci-fi, underwater, fantasy, or dance program for families. We have not tested it sufficiently with children six and under, but we highly recommend it for over-sixes, particularly with a creative arts activity in a museum or art class.

D.M.

SOMETHING QUEER AT THE LIBRARY by Nell Cox
10 min liveaction (Bosustow/USA)

This "mystery," based on a story by Elizabeth Levy, begins on a bright spring day when two pre-adolescent girls go to a library to do some research on dog training. Jill and Gwen want to train Fletcher, Jill's basset hound, so he can compete in a dog show which is only a few weeks away. Unfortunately, Fletcher refuses to respond to commands or do any tricks.

The would-be dog trainers discover that many pictures are missing from the library books. Shocked that anyone would deface a book, and not wanting to be blamed themselves, they set out to find the culprit. Their first clue comes when they discover that all the missing pictures are of Lhasa apsos. Later, when they discover chocolate fingerprints on one of the pages, the young sleuths figure they'll track down the culprit (who is obviously fond of both Lhasa apsos and chocolate) at the dog show.

Meanwhile, the girls work at the thankless task of trying to train Fletcher who sits implacably as the girls beg him to fetch.

When the day of the dog show arrives, Gwen and Jill spot a blond girl, Pam, who is eagerly watching the Lhasa apso competition and eating chocolate-covered raisins. They confront her about the library thefts and she runs away. Jill, Gwen, and Fletcher follow in hot and slapstick pursuit.

When Pam ends up, literally, out on the limb of a tree with Fletcher standing guard below, she confesses to the crime, explaining that she loves Lhasa apsos but her parents will not let her mention the subject of dogs. Pam says she only wanted one picture at first; but, as she was cutting up the book, she lost control -- which is why so many pictures were missing. Happily, all ends well. The girls become friends and Pam works in the library until the damaged books are paid for. Fletcher even wins a prize at the show for having the most unusual markings!

SOMETHING QUEER AT THE LIBRARY delighted most young viewers. Children laughed continuously at Fletcher and there was much discussion among them as each new clue surfaced. Applause followed many screenings, and children spontaneously recalled their favorite scenes: "[Fletcher] chasing the girl;" "when they tried to give [Fletcher] a bath;" "when [Fletcher] wouldn't fetch." All agreed that Fletcher was the best character in the film "'cause he was funny."

Despite its didactic intentions -- which young viewers understood quite well -- the film was enjoyed by older children. When we asked them why the filmmaker made this film, they responded with "to show you shouldn't steal things" and "you should take good care of things you borrow." Girls and boys alike were engaged by the two female protagonists. Credit for all this must rest somehow with filmmaker Cox, who aside from being an excellent director obviously understands the elements of a successful "lightweight" didactic film.

Our viewers became involved in discussions about values and caring for borrowed property after the screenings, but SOMETHING QUEER AT THE LIBRARY could also be used to encourage children to make up their own mystery stories or dramas. Best with seven- to ten-year-olds.

M.A.R.

STEAMBOAT by Lee Strosnider 11 min nonverbal/ liveaction (Little Red Filmhouse/USA) 1976

Over a daybreak shot of a wide river, a male narrator says, "A hundred years ago the Mississippi was filled with steamboats moving cargo and people up and down the river. Now we just carry passengers, folks who want to see and hear and feel what it's like to ride on a steamboat." From then on, this slow-paced study of the Delta Queen paddle wheeler is nonverbal; information is conveyed through meditative camera work, accompanied by a country music soundtrack. Viewers see a sunrise on the Mississippi; close-ups of officers and mates at work below and above decks. The Delta Queen passes under a raised drawbridge. There are shots of houses, farmers, and tourists on the shore; passengers picnicking on the shore, with the steamboat docked nearby; passengers listening to the giant calliope; and sundry views of the great river. For a time, the camera focuses on the inner workings of the boat's machinery, the mechanisms that run the giant, red paddle wheel which, in turn, moves the boat. The film ends with a glimpse of the Delta Queen at dusk, seen through tree branches which line the river's edge; lights from the steamboat sparkle on the darkening waters of the Mississippi.

Despite its range of images, STEAMBOAT was problematic for most young viewers, particularly those in grades three and four. Children of this age were apparently too young to appreciate the romantic ambiance of this historical mode of transportation. They waited for information on the subject of steamboats, and were apparently disappointed by its lack. While for adults STEAMBOAT may create a sense of pleasant nostalgia, for the children who saw it, the film evoked a feeling of frustration. In our view, its unfocused structure (which is based on neither chronology nor function -- two obvious possibilities for a film of this type) lacked cohesion and therefore diminished its ability to inform children who had never before encountered a steamboat. Only one child was able to connect with the film; she said it reminded her of a steamboat ride she took to Nova Scotia.

Most children said they liked the music and the shots of machinery ("the machines were neat") but their overall response was unenthusiastic: "it was boring," "it wasn't exciting," "it was just riding on a boat." STEAMBOAT might work with very young children (ages four to seven) as a purely visual experience. It might also prove more successful as part of a program on different kinds of transportation, if children had some previous information about and were already interested in steamboats. It would also help to tell them that the film has no story line.

B.W.

WILLIAM by Toni Frangakis 15 min dialogue/ liveaction (Franciscan Communications/USA) 1973

Although it contains some lines of dialogue, WILLIAM functions as a nonverbal film. Based on a story by Mary Lou McPortland, this film tells of a boy who is rejected by everyone until, through simple dumb luck, he finds a lost diamond ring.

The first thing viewers see is the close-up of a cricket, followed by a montage of images (people, faces, group activities) and sounds (voices, loud and unintelligible). A group of preadolescent boys playing ball trip over a blue mass in the middle of the playing field. It is William, a blond, pug-nosed boy of perhaps seven or eight who wears thick glasses through which he is absent-mindedly inspecting a mushroom. The ball players shout impatiently, "William, you're right in the middle of our field. Get out of the way!"

William is a loner, an outsider--but not entirely by choice. When "The William Tell Overture" comes up on the soundtrack, someone rings a bell and a large and boisterous crowd rushes, in fast motion, to the picnic spread. Pushing and screaming, people literally stuff themselves with food, to the accompaniment of magnified sounds of slurps, chomps, and chewing. Quietly, William makes his way to the picnic table and watches impassively as food disappears before his eyes. With a calculated efficiency he grabs a heapingly full plate (left momentarily by someone else) and goes to eat his food under a tree, far from the madding crowd.

Even there, however, chaos impinges on his quiet meal. Some boys, sitting in the branches above William, drop leaves and dirt onto his plate and tauntingly chant, "William is a scaredy cat." Not surprisingly, William loses his appetite. William watches his father playing croquet, and silently observes as his mother plays cards. When his mother tells him to leave, William tries to join in a game of jump-rope. "You blew it," the girls shout; "This is a girls' game, you know." Undaunted, William then tries to join in a game of football--only no one wants him on their team. So William retreats to the wooded park alone.

At this point the atmosphere of the film changes. From an obnoxiously noisy beginning, it takes on a pastoral, almost dreamlike quality. William catches a turtle and smiles at it, then he finds a worm. To a flute accompaniment, the camera moves in close, focusing on birds, ants, and the many small creatures which live in the woods. William (often not in the picture) apparently observes in rapture and fascination. Eventually, William notices a thin, viscid trail on the grass. He follows it, crawling along on his hands and knees.

Suddenly, the quiet stillness is broken by the resumption of the over-loud sound of the crowd. All the other picnickers are crawling on their hands and knees, searching the ground for some lost object. A heavy, matronly woman appears particularly distressed. William looks at the others momentarily, then, looking down, finds the end of his thin white trail--a snail. Turning the little creature over to examine it, he is surprised to find a diamond ring stuck to the snail's foot.

Just then, the crowd spots William. "William found it!" shouts the woman in relief. But William in his absent-minded way--almost as if he cannot hear--is simply staring at the diamond-crusted snail. Then "The William Tell Overture" begins and the crowd surges toward William as the excited woman exclaims, "I always knew there was something special about that boy!"

As the film draws to a close, William is once again on the field--only this time he is included in the game. A high-flying ball arcs right for him. In silent slow motion William stares at the approaching ball. Then he looks down at the grass below where a cricket sits, apparently right in his path. Then William looks directly at the camera. The frame freezes and the film ends.

Generally, children's energies seesawed with the dynamics of the film. During the crowd scenes, children talked animatedly and laughed boisterously, although some MCC evaluators reported that their laughter seemed nervous and uncomfortable. When William was pelted with dirt and excluded from the other children's games, young viewers became tensely hushed and still and watched with knitted eyebrows. The nature scenes seemed to provide some relief from the other scenes' intensity and viewers relaxed, alternating between observing the insects and animals with fascination and crying "Yuck!" with disgusted delight.

In describing William after the film, children called him "a left-out boy," "an insect freak," and a kid who was "very spacey and always daydreaming." While children's verbal and nonverbal responses to William's "victimization" seemed to indicate a strong empathy for William's plight, none expressed empathy for William himself. One sixth grader, for example, characterized him as "a little weird--but look at his parents."

Most children thought the film was about "a boy who was unwanted so he went into nature." Many said that "the insects were William's friends" and "it was sad because no one would play with him." A few said the film was about "loneliness," "hating," and "doing things by yourself."

Adults vary in their perception of what WILLIAM is about as well. One MCC evaluator summarized it this way: "The story of an outcast boy who is suddenly accepted because he finds a diamond--a critical look at people and society." Another described it as, "the story of a rejected boy who becomes a hero and must make a decision between joining the pack or being an individual." Still another wrote, "A cute but incredibly unsociable boy is caught in the dilemma of whether to commune with nature or join the rottenest group of people--including the boy's parents--that I've ever seen." And, lastly, another saw it as "a boy who is always rejected is accepted, but he wonders why he is now accepted."

Among children there was overwhelming confusion about why William was excluded from all the games and activities--an issue they spent considerable time trying to resolve in their discussions. Young children typically resolved the issue in their explanation of the film. "The story is about a person who couldn't do anything because he was too small." Older children expressed their confusion overtly: "What was wrong with William?" "Why [was he] so different?" "How come he never talks, what is he, mute?" Interestingly, most children, both young and old, decided that William was rejected because of his size, "He had no friends because he was too little." Some thought that perhaps he was rejected "because he didn't talk" or "wouldn't talk." Two different fifth/sixth grades explained that the "other people think he's different because he wears eyeglasses."

During the film children expressed pity for William: "Poor kid, he gets nothing, nothing." Sometimes they talked to William: "Steal it! Steal it!" (during the lunch scene); "Come on, catch it!" (during the final scene when the ball is coming his way). A major concern for our viewers was why people in the film treated William so badly--and why he put up with it. During the lunch scene one child said, "I'd have thrown food at them." After the film ended, children wanted to know, "Why didn't he leave his parents?" "Why didn't he split from that camp?" "All the people were bigger; weren't there any kids his own age?"

In the absence of motivation and adequate character development, the portrayal of the crowd takes on a nastiness that is gratuitous--an aspect children responded to and remarked about. Since the crowd is so clearly "the villain," there is nothing for William to play off and even he is reduced to a stereotype of the nice, oddball kid with glasses whom everybody pities but shuns. Pity--especially for children--may evoke some feelings of sympathy, but it does not evoke empathy. [Editor's note: Although its theme is quite different, the Russian feature, OBLOMOV, by Nikita Mikhalkov, manages to evoke empathy for a nebbish character, even an understanding of his problem--an absolute necessity if viewers are going to respond positively to characters who can be labelled "social failures."]

The diversity of opinion about the point of the film, and the confusion about its ending may be due to the film's lack of focus--a problem too many values clarification films suffer from. Films of this genre pay too much attention to "the message" and not enough to telling a good, plausible, and dramatic story; as a consequence, the message gets muddled because it is not firmly based in the drama.

Perhaps the main problem with WILLIAM is its values -- or at least its apparent values. Using a diamond as a metaphor for something of great value is difficult to carry off in oral or print formats but, in the realistic images of film, having William find a diamond--and such a large one at that --moves the story into the realm of fantasy.

There are however even greater problems with the film's climax. First, since William is only accepted by the crowd after he discovers the diamond, he is apparently valued only for what he can do for them--not for being the unique person he is. In addition to reflecting a strangely materialistic set of values, this point seems particularly inappropriate vis-a-vis children. Children can do very little for "the crowd" except be good children. Oddly, William already seemed to be a good child; it was the crowd and his parents who were out of line.

Secondly, finding the diamond was a coincidence--a lucky accident, thus a questionable vehicle for William's gaining acceptance. Neither the crowd nor he had to change in any way. Everything worked out, as if by magic. As a result, William's acceptance seemed to be a tenuous condition (perhaps that is what the ending is all about). While this might be an interesting point for adults to discuss--and we recommend it for that, it is quite inappropriate for children who, lacking any real understanding of the issues involved in "man's inhumanity to man," are more concerned with William than with the crowd's humanity. Children are, thus, left with a very discomforting plot resolution. If William does not catch the ball, it seems logical to conclude that he will once more be dropped from the game since he is clearly not into it.

We feel that, for children, the film largely represents an opportunity lost. The issues it touched on are very important ones for children; it simply did not communicate them in a way our groups could identify with.

Despite its flaws--and the criticism it generated among older groups, most first through sixth graders rated the film fairly high as entertainment; unfortunately, this would not be a particularly appropriate use of the film since it clearly requires discussion. In this issue, Joanna Uhry's article describes how she incorporated it into activities to help children explore and express their feelings--but note her use of the word brutal in the filmography.

M.L.F.

THE WOLF AND THE WHITETAIL by Marty Stouffer
26 min liveaction (Marty Stouffer Productions/USA)

Birth, growth, learning, survival, social networks, mating, death, and the balance of nature, THE WOLF AND THE WHITETAIL examines these topics while exploring the interrelationship of wolves and whitetail deer in the Rocky Mountains. This sensitive and carefully constructed documentary follows wolf cubs from birth to maturity, with an emphasis on the training of young animals in the techniques of survival.

The film begins with a time-lapse sequence of a wilderness pond seen through the changes of seasons. The cycle stops with spring, when wolf cubs and whitetail fawns are born. The lush photography includes rare shots of the young animals in the wild, including a scene of the birth of twin whitetail fawns.

Filmmaker Stouffer's information-packed narration (in his own voice) discusses the stages of development in detail, and makes interesting comparisons/contrasts between the behavior of wolf and deer, and the similarity of behavior between wolves and humans. Fawns are shown learning to walk, in the context of how important the ability to run will be for their survival. Wolf "pups" chew on everything; they must learn to use their mouths in the hunt, and to carry food back to their own young later on. Stouffer explains that wolves are "not born killers;" they must be carefully trained by the pack to become effective hunters, to ensure their own survival.

A hunt is shown where the deer gets away (ten deer escape for every one caught), and a healthy buck fends off a wolf with his impressive rack of antlers. Two deer are actually caught by the wolves; one after a chase, the other is too sick to move. These documentations of actual killings are not detailed, not emphasized--the final action is discreetly hidden behind grasses and trees.

The filmmaker obviously spent a great deal of time in the wild to "capture" on film the life cycle of the wolf and the whitetail, and the visuals are exceptional. The sound track, however, is a sometimes awkward mixture of heavy narration, mediocre background music, and wonderful sounds from the wild--expecially wolf howls and the yelps of the cubs.

THE WOLF AND THE WHITETAIL takes great pains to emphasize the symbiotic nature of the predator/prey relationship. Wolves are portrayed as killing out of necessity, not malice, and Stouffer explains that the wolves are "like a gardener pulling weeds." The two species are "halves of one whole...deer feed the wolves; wolves keep the deer strong."

Children six and over stayed with THE WOLF AND THE WHITETAIL, but it particularly fascinated eight to eleven-year-olds. At that stage, children are trying to come to terms with the mysteries of life and are eager to absorb as much information as possible. They seemed to appreciate the "grown-up" nature of the subject and the straight-forward presentation. At two large family screenings at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City (about 1,000 people attended each screening), MCC showed THE WOLF AND THE WHITETAIL as the last film in a ninety-minute program. As the lights came on and the audience started up the isles, children howled like the wolves in the film. It seemed they were trying to preserve the special atmosphere, to make the film last just a bit longer. At least eight children (ages eight to eleven) sought us out to say that it was the best film they had ever seen.

An excellent family film, it works particularly well for anyone eight and older and would make a great addition to natural history museum collections. It also makes a fine discussion film for classroom use for third grade on up -- particularly because of its sensitive handling of the interaction of predator and non-predator.

G.M.

film review contributors

M.L.F. - Merrill Lee Fuchs is Research Director for the Media Center for Children and a former teacher.

D.M. - Dianna Maeurer is presently Media Director for the Staten Island Children's Museum. She has a BA in Educational Media from Emerson College and has worked in film and video for the last three years, including working as an MCC film evaluation intern in the fall of 1980.

G.M. - Gina Michaels, an artist and free-lance writer, has conducted hundreds of film evaluations with children.

M.A.R. - Mary Ann Renz is an actress/mime who performs with Orkidstra, a special children's troup. She was an MCC film evaluation intern during 1980 and graduated with a BA in Media Studies from Fordham University.

L.S. - Lorna Smith is a communications major at the School of Visual Arts and was an MCC film evaluation intern during late 1980 and early 1981.

B.W. - Barbara Weber is a free-lance writer with a strong background in children's theater. She was a film evaluation intern at MCC in 1980 and is a graduate of Hunter College/CUNY with a BA in English.

The films reviewed in this issue were evaluated at the following sites: the American Museum of Natural History, Barnard School, Calhoun School, G.A.M.E., Hunter College Elementary School, P.S. 124, P.S. 75 and Walden School in Manhattan; the Bronx Museum of the Arts and Wave Hill Center for Environmental Studies in the Bronx; P.S. 105 and Packer-Collegiate Institute in Brooklyn; the Staten Island Children's Museum; and Edgewood Elementary School and Grady School in Westchester County, New York.

distributors

STEPHEN BOSUSTOW PRODUCTIONS
1649 Eleventh Street, Santa Monica CA 90404

ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA EDUCATIONAL
425 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago IL 60611

FRANCISCAN COMMUNICATIONS CENTER
1229 South Santee Street, Los Angeles CA 90015

LITTLE RED FILMHOUSE
666 North Robertson, Los Angeles CA 90069

PICTURE START
204½ West John Street, Champaign IL 61820

MARTY STOUFFER PRODUCTIONS
300 South Spring Street, Aspen CO 81611

BARBARA WILK
29 Surf Road, Westport CT 06880